



Pedagogical Pathways: *The Duchess of Malfi* Marriage

Summary

Students examine the idea of marriage in *The Duchess of Malfi*, investigate how it is depicted, and how different characters react to the Duchess' marriage.

Objectives

Before, while, and after reading *The Duchess of Malfi*, these activities can help learners to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the role and depiction of marriage in *The Duchess of Malfi* through close reading
- Investigate the different stages of the plot by focusing on the Duchess' marriage and its repercussions
- Investigate how different characters view the Duchess' marriage and discuss what this shows about the characters

Guiding Questions

1. What role does marriage play in *The Duchess of Malfi*?
2. How can exploring the depiction of marriage and its repercussions help us understand *The Duchess of Malfi* and its figures as a whole?

Activities (overview)

- **Pre-Reading (as a class)**
 - Students activate their background knowledge on different types of marriage (arranged marriage, trophy wife, etc.), and they focus on the ideas of the relationships between love, marriage, ambition, and money.
- **While Reading Activities**
 - Students look at sections of the play in which characters describe marriage. Students do a close reading of the texts and compare them.
 - Students look at descriptions of marriage/love and see how they portray the speakers' opinions.
 - Students read the sections of the play that highlight the opinions of Ferdinand and the Cardinal of the Duchess' marriage. How does this help the students understand these characters?
- **Post-Reading Activities**
 - Students read Delio's conversation with Julia in Act 2 Scene 4 and look at how money, wealth, women, love and power are depicted through language.
 - Students compare Ferdinand and the Cardinal's reactions to finding out that the Duchess is married to Bosola's reaction to discovering who the Duchess's husband is (Act 3 Scene 2).
 - Students compare what the Duchess says about her brothers with what her brothers really think.

Activities

Pre-reading: Motivations for Marriage

- Have students brainstorm different motivations for getting married.
 - Example ideas (*for the instructor* - do not write all of these on the board. Give one or two examples to the class, if necessary):
 - out of love
 - for a trophy wife
 - for money
 - out of rebellion
 - an arranged marriage
 - for citizenship
 - because they want to start a family
 - because the woman is pregnant
 - because they feel like they are supposed to (family pressure, etc.)
- Ask students:
 - How might motivations for marriage differ between cultures and time periods?
 - How is marriage related to love, ambition, and money in the above mentioned circumstances? What other ideas come into play (e.g., lust, fear, shame, etc.)?

While reading: Thoughts on (re)marriage

- Read the following two sections of the play and answer the questions below.
 - Act 1 Scene 2 when the Cardinal and Ferdinand discuss the idea of the Duchess' remarrying (from Cardinal "We are to part from you; and your own discretion / Must now be your director" until Ferdinand exits)
 - Act 1 Scene 2 when the Duchess and Antonio talk about marriage (from *Enter Antonio* until *Exeunt Duchess and Antonio*).

Question: How to these scenes differ? For example...

- Who is in power?
- What does each character have to say about (re)marriage?
- What reasons do they give for their beliefs? What reasons might they not be saying but potentially be implying?

While reading: Metaphors of marriage

[NOTE: See Appendix for sample handout with sample answers]

- **Part I:** Have students read the conversation between Bosola and the Duchess in Act 2 Scene 2, starting with Bosola “I have a present for your grace” and ending with Delio “Light there, lights!” and have them answer the following questions:
 - What does Bosola say about the source of the apricots? About grafting?
 - What is the Duchess’ opinion of grafting?
 - How does this reflect ideas of class and/or marriage and how are they related?
- **Part II:** Have students read the following conversations between the Duchess and Antonio and underline all of the words that relate to money or worth.
 - Act 1 Scene 2, from *Enter Antonio* until Antonio “Give him all”
 - Act 1 Scene 2, from the Duchess “So, now the ground’s broke, / You may discover what a wealthy mine / I will make you lord of” until *Exeunt Duchess and Antonio*
 - **Question:** How are money, wealth, women, love and power depicted here? How are they related? Discuss as a class.

While reading: Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and the Duchess’ marriage - The stages

[NOTE: See Appendix for sample handouts with sample answers]

- Have students fill in a matrix that focuses on the different stages of the Duchess’ marriage and its repercussions [see Appendix] and answer the following questions:
 - How do the character’s actions and reactions differ?
 - What do the differences in their reactions show about the characters?
 - What reasons do Ferdinand and the Cardinal give for the Duchess to not remarry? How do Ferdinand and the Cardinal describe a widow who remarries?
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Post-reading: Expanding ideas of money, wealth, women, love, and power

- **Note:** this is a good continuation of the while-reading activity “Metaphors of marriage.”
- Have students read Delio’s conversation with Julia in Act 2 Scene 4, starting with *Enter Delio* until the end of the scene, then answer the following questions:
 - How are money, wealth, women, love and power depicted here?
 - How does this compare with the conversation between the Duchess and Antonio?

Post-reading: A deeper look at the reactions to the Duchess’ marriage

- **Note:** this is a good continuation of the while-reading activity “Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and the Duchess’ marriage - The stages.”
- Have students compare Ferdinand and the Cardinal’s reactions to finding out that the Duchess is married to Bosola’s reaction to discovering who the Duchess’s husband is (Act 3 scene 2). How does Bosola describe the Duchess? How is his description of her and reaction to the marriage different from how Ferdinand and the Cardinal describe the Duchess and react to her remarriage?
- Find excerpts in the text where the Duchess talks about what she thinks of her brothers. How do her descriptions of her brothers compare with how her brothers really act? What does this show about the Duchess?

Appendix

Marriage

Metaphors of Marriage

(FOR INSTRUCTOR)

Part I: Read the conversation between Bosola and the Duchess in Act 2 Scene 2, starting with Bosola “I have a present for your grace” and ending with Delio “Light there, lights!”

Questions:

(1) What does Bosola say about the source of the apricots? About grafting?

E.g.: The apricots were fertilized with dung, grafting is unnatural, etc.

(2) What is the Duchess’s opinion of grafting?

E.g.: Grafting is a ‘bettering of nature’, etc.

(3) How does this reflect ideas of class and/or marriage and how they are related?

E.g.: Grafting is like having a mixed-class marriage (like the Duchess and Antonio). The Duchess thinks this can be beneficial, Bosola implies that it is unnatural.

Part II: Read the following conversation between the Duchess and Antonio and underline all of the words relate to money or worth.

- Act 1 Scene 2, from *Enter Antonio* until Antonio: “Give him all”
- Act 1 Scene 2, from the Duchess: “So, now the ground’s broke, / You may discover what a wealthy mine / I will make you lord of” until *Exeunt Duchess and Antonio*

Question: How are money, wealth, women, love and power depicted here? How are they related? Discuss as a class.

Marriage

Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and the Duchess' marriage - The stages

Look at the matrix on the next page, and fill in the missing information, then answer the following questions.

(1) How do the character's actions and reactions differ?

(2) What do the differences in reactions show about the characters?

(3) a. What reasons do Ferdinand and the Cardinal give for the Duchess not to remarry?

b. How do Ferdinand and the Cardinal describe a widow who remarries?

Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and the Duchess' marriage - The stages - Matrix
(For Instructor)

	Plot Event	Where does this happen in the play?	Who is involved? What are their (re)action(s)? (Give textual evidence)
1	Ferdinand and the Cardinal talk to the Duchess, forbidding her to remarry	<i>Act 1 Scene 2</i>	
2	<i>Ferdinand and the Cardinal find out that the Duchess is pregnant</i>	Act 2 Scene 5	
3a	i. <i>Ferdinand talks to the Duchess about reputation</i>	i. Act 3 Scene 2	
	ii. <i>Ferdinand implies a death-threat, suggests that the Duchess commits suicide</i>	ii. Act 3 Scene 2	
	iii. <i>Ferdinand scares the Duchess with a dead man's hand</i>	iii. Act 4 Scene 1	
3b	The Cardinal has the Duchess killed	the murder: <i>Act 4 Scene 2</i> his confession: <i>Act 5 Scene 2</i>	
4	i. <i>Ferdinand's reaction to the death of the Duchess</i>	i. Act 4 Scene 2	
	ii. <i>The Cardinal's reaction to the death of the Duchess</i>	ii. Act 5 Scene 2	